Knoll Lodge Still Going Strong after 106 Years

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Knoll Lodge is a social group that meets every Thursday night at their cabin on the Vermilion River, about five miles north of Fairbury. A meal is prepared for the group by a designated member.

The history of this group traces back to the first organization meeting held on April 15, 1919. Mr. J. C. Kessler was appointed as the temporary chairman, and A. D. Cooley was appointed as the temporary secretary.

The group needed a place to hold their meetings. Mr. Cooley had spoken with Walter Tavener, and Mr. Tavener agreed to let the group use an old camping site on his timberland. A committee of five men was appointed to investigate the plans and costs of building a cabin for the group to hold their cook-outs and meetings. The committee consisted of Charles Schnetzler, A. B. Claudon, E. B. Ramsey, A. D. Cooley, and Owen Bailey.

At this first organizational meeting, the list of the twenty charter members of the group was read. The group decided to limit total membership to these 20 charter members. A second committee of five members was appointed to study the location of the new facility and a lease for the facility. This committee consisted of Dr. Dan Brewer, Hugh Pence, Charles Schnetzler, F. M. McDowell, and A. D. Cooley as chairman.

A third committee was established to draw up the first Constitution and bylaws for the group. The chairman of this third committee was Elmer Ramsey. Committee members were Charles Gregg, Newton Fulton, G. B. Spence, and Henry Nussbaum.

A fourth committee was established to determine the equipment needed for the new facility. Mr. J. C. Kessler was chairman, and the members were A. D. Cooley, Frank Shaw, N. W. Hanson, and Jack Fugate.

The last item on the agenda for this first meeting of Knoll Lodge was the establishment of annual dues. The annual dues were set at $25 per year. This amount would be equivalent to $463 in today's dollars. Most of these charter members were local businessmen or medical doctors. The members at this first organizational meeting included J. C. Kessler, Hugh Pence, F. M. McDowell, Jack Fugate, Dr. Dan Brewer, Elmer Ramsey, Charles Gregg, N. W. Hanson, A. D. Cooley, Owen Bailey, William Morris, Ed Kessler, and Charles Schnetzler.

The first Knoll Lodge cabin was constructed next to the Vermilion River, and a meeting was held on June 23, 1919, to approve the construction bills. A dedication ceremony was then held on June 27, 1919, for the new meeting place.

At about the same time, the first Constitution was written and approved by the club members. This Constitution included four house and ground rules. The first of these rules stated that from midnight on Sunday to 8 PM on Tuesday nights, the ladies of the members may enjoy the privileges and advantages of the club when accompanied by a member or members of Knoll Lodge. Another rule stated that any member preparing meals at the lodge must wash and tidy the kitchen utensils, sweep the floor, and put everything away after the meal, ensuring the area was left in better condition than when the meal was prepared.

By 1950, Ada Chesebro (1895-1987) had acquired the land on which the lodge was built. She increased the lease cost to $100 per year. This annual lease amount would be equivalent to $1,327 in today's dollars. Also in 1950, an electric generator was purchased from Harley Honegger for $275 to provide electricity to the cabin. This purchase amount would be equivalent to $3,650 in today's dollars.

Two years later, in 1952, the Vermilion River, adjacent to the Knoll Lodge cabin, was dredged to enhance the water flow downstream. In 1953, the idea was adopted for each member to act as the chairman for one meal during the year.

In 1957, the lodge members voted to have electricity run from First Street down the lane to the cabin. In 1962, new kitchen counters and cupboards were installed. A new gas stove was installed in 1966. Knoll Lodge celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 1969.

In 1977, the limit on the number of members was increased from 25 to 30. Four years later, in 1981, Dean Moser and Lyle Honegger built a new steak grille with an overhead canopy. In 1983, the same two members erected a new outhouse.

In 1986, the group's rules were changed, requiring any new member to be approved by at least 75% of the current members. That same year, vinyl siding was installed on the cabin's exterior walls, and several windows were replaced. New interior paneling and coat hooks were also installed.

That same year, Loren French dug a new well, and a Red Jacket pump was installed for $779, equivalent to $2,265 in today's dollars. Warren Beckley then exchanged the Red Jacket pump for an old electric water system.

Old records of Knoll Lodge include a listing of all 105 members of the group from the founding in 1919 until 1984. The documents outlining the lodge's history, including a copy of the Constitution and a list of 105 members, can be accessed on the Fairbury Echoes Museum website using this link.

The small group of men who envisioned a small cabin on the Vermilion River for social meetings back in 1919 probably never dreamed they were creating an organization that would last for more than 100 years and include between 100 and 200 Fairbury area men as members over that time period.

The cooking shed and water pump just northeast of the main cabin at Knoll Lodge. The logo sign on the east side of the cooking shed states that Knoll Lodge was established in 1919 and the sign gives thanks to Si and Dean Moser.